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## FIRRO AND SLUFAY: THE TRADITIONAL LITANIES OF THE IRAQW

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**ABSTRACT** The poetic appeal and potential of *Firro* and *Slufay* have often been alluded to but not rigorously studied owing to the inavailability of reliable texts of a certain or desirable magnitude. This paper attempts, among other things, to provide such texts to enrich the already existing materials and to stimulate further research.

The discussion of the qualities and procedures of this genre of Oral Literature is slanted towards seeing *Firro* and *Slufay* as communal poetry of the Iraqw which springs from and continues to be fuelled by their traditional litanies.

**Key Words:** Oral literature; Poetry; Traditional litany; Iraqw; Tanzania.

### INTRODUCTION

Topographically the Iraqw make the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley and the troughs of Lake Eyasi and Lake Manyara their natural borders. More significantly, the Barabaig and the Gorowa to the south east, the Mbugwe to the east, the Hapzapi to the north west, the Masai to the north and the Nyaturu to the south are their neighbours.

Scholarly doubts and controversy still hover over the origin and presence of the Iraqw in Northern Tanzania. With varying degrees of success, a few studies have plausibly described and accounted for the presence of the Iraqw neighbours but on the Iraqw they are impressively vague. Ethnically the Iraqw comprise of the Gorowa, Alawa, Bulungi and the Mbugwe. Cultural historians, however, have enthusiastically concluded that *Aya Iraqw* (the Land of the Iraqw) and its precincts, "with its Khoisan, Cushitic, Nilotic and Bantu speaking populations, is the most linguistically diverse on the whole African continent" (Temu & Kimambo, 1969). Not only are the Iraqw surrounded by linguistic controversy, they are also shrouded in eugenic speculation.

The impression that the Iraqw...make on the visitor of being a distinct physical as well as a linguistic type has led to much speculation on their affiliations and origins. In the past, the whole group was largely referred to as Hamitic, but it is doubtful whether adequate material existed to justify such a label. Some phonetic and grammatical features seem to invite comparison with Hamitic or Semitic languages, but these are inconclusive, and up to the present there is no clear evidence of affinity with any of the larger linguistic classificatory groups" (Whiteley, 1958).

Linguistics experts and enthusiasts, unable to resolve their disagreements, consign the Iraqw to the linguistic limbo of the Khoisan and the Southward Cushites, then tenuously proceed to trace their legendary southward trek from the Middle East into

Table 1 *Kuru*: The Iraqw Almanac.

	Month	Weather	Activity
1. November	<i>Qado Mar</i>	First rains ( <i>Saxi</i> )	Cultivation
2. December	<i>Axwarir Tlaw</i>	Rains as above and grass start to sprout	Cultivation continues and sowing starts
3. January	<i>Axwari Hho</i>	Heavy rains ( <i>Buhare</i> )	First weeding ( <i>Kakani</i> )
4. February	<i>Tlufqa</i>	Heaviest rains ( <i>Bohare</i> )	Second weeding ( <i>Alkia</i> )
5. March	<i>Huyaa</i>	Heavy rains continue	Third weeding, beans ripening time
6. April	<i>Domu Boo'</i>	Scanty rainfall	Harvesting beans
7. May	<i>Domu Awak</i>	Very scanty rainfall cold and dry season begins	Preparing granaries
8. June	<i>Qya</i>	Cold season	Harvesting
9. July	<i>Tsaqutmo</i>	Cold season	Harvesting maize
10. August	<i>Tiambo'amo</i>	Hot and windy season sets in ( <i>Afe</i> )	Maize harvesting continues
11. September	<i>Tarqway</i>	Hot season	Bush clearing and spreading cow dung in the farm
12. October	<i>Qado Kahar</i>	Hot season	Bush clearing and spreading cow dung in the farm

Table 2. Daily Schedule.

Time	Activity
1. <i>Sakw Loa</i> or <i>Kumberi</i> (Dawn)	Grinding grain for flour
2. <i>Konkamo</i> I —do— II (Cock Grow) III	Grinding continues—till morning
3. <i>Matlatle</i> (Morning up to 10 a.m.)	Milking the cows and cleaning the cowshed
4. <i>Ametlemu</i> (between 10 a.m. to 12 a.m.)	Cultivation, taking cattle to the pastures, cleaning the court yard and the house as whole
5. <i>Aymadu-u</i> (Eating time)	Cooking and taking cattle to the water holes
6. <i>Yarafi</i>	Firewood chopping and preparing the cowshed.
7. <i>Tsindo</i> (Evening)	Bringing cattle home from the pastures and milking time

Ethiopia and the Eastern Horn, from where they dispersed to East Africa following the Rift Valley and keeping close to the source of water.

The Iraqw themselves, however, believe they all came in waves from a place called Mangwatay which, though unidentified, is in Kondoa Irangi in central Tanzania and settled under the shadow of Mount Hanang from where they have scattered to their present homesteads which constitute Aya Iraqw (Land of the Iraqw).

They are an agrico-pastoral people, and it is of interest and value to examine how the pastoral and the agrarian elements are related in their day to day activities (Yoneyama, 1970). Cattle have a special place in the culture of the Iraqw. Most of their ritual observances involve ceremonial killing of livestock for communal meals, milk is an important item in the people's diet, and cow dung is needed for ritual as well as agricultural purposes.

The annual crops of the Iraqw are cereals and legumes. They cultivate beans, maize, sorghum, potatoes, millet and eleusine. Their annual calendar indicates that they are strongly attached to the soil, but their daily schedule is dominated by pastoral activities.

## ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The Iraqw venerate three kinds of supernatural beings. These are the supreme goddess, *Loa*, the malevolent terrestrial spirits, *Netlang'w* and the living-dead, *Muk Yamu*.

*Loa* is the source of life and the moulder of the land and the sky. *Loa* illuminates the world with the light of the sun, and opens the dome of the sky for her blessings to flow to the earth in the form of rain. *Loa* is responsible for the steady flow of the universe and for the smooth changing of the seasons as well as the folding and unfolding of day and night. Her transcendent powers are manifested through natural phenomena like storms, floods, and when she is in high spirits and chooses to play on her drums, mortal ears register thunder, whereas when she surveys the day's work to see if anything has been left unaccomplished, the Iraqw see lightning.

### The Problem of Evil

In the beginning, *Loa* had a helper who was known as *Netlang'w* and the two were great friends. *Netlang'w* being junior to *Loa* was her helper and agent, but it is not known for certain just about when *Loa* moulded *Netlang'w* remained obedient and dutiful to *Loa* until *Loa* created man. When time came for a decision to be made concerning the destiny of man, a dispute ensued. *Netlang'w* wanted not only to share in that destiny but also to control it. *Loa* refused and *Netlang'w* rebelled and was banished from *Loa's* courtyard and cast into the Ocean. Consequently *Netlang'w* became the enemy of *Loa* and also of man. *Netlang'w* crawled like a snake and came close and started to molest man. *Netlang'w* dug furrows from the ocean and the lakes and directed them to the homesteads on the ridges. Consequently life for man became an endless strife with *Netlang'w*. Thus all epidemics, sudden and premature deaths are attributed to *Netlang'w* and his cohorts. *Netlang'w* is thought of as a heavy footed aquatic beast and is responsible for droughts, drying up of water holes, streams and wells. Apart from causing natural catastrophes, *Netlang'w* spreads and intensifies epidemics and promotes malignant diseases upon human and livestock.

It is also known all over Aya-Iraqw that witches cannot carry out their activities without the aid of *Netlang'w*. If a family is struck by a catastrophe, a diviner is consulted to prescribe the measures to be taken to repel *Netlang'w*. Usually they throw *Maaye*, bitter fruits, in his direction. If this fails, the family vacates the homestead.

### *Muk Yamu*: The Living-Dead

These are spirits of the dead. Some of the rites which are directed to the spirits of the dead are not communal observances but are restricted to the family. For example, a widow may offer sacrifice to the spirit of her husband to avert misfortune.

### *Slufumis*: Worship

Usually individual households at time perform and participate in special rites in connection with new harvest, first milk or first brew from fresh eleusine. The following are some examples.

a) *New Milk* The first milk is not used for human food before proper rites are performed. In the morning following the birth of the calf, *masao*, first milk, is taken in a container by an elder who stands near the threshold with his back to the house and starting from the right-hand side of the entrance sprinkles milk two times accompanying the act with the words, "*Muk doren oo dori no yamu oo ta baraqawan*" (Let our heavenly and earthly people receive this milk).

After this the scene shifts to the *ufa*, —cow dung heaps, and the same rite is performed starting with the right hand side *ufa*. Finally the container is emptied at the door. Thereafter the rite is repeated at the door but without the accompanying words whenever milk is brought into the house.

b) *Dii* (Butter) The first butter is put in a clean container and a certain amount is thrown towards the sun using the middle finger. The rest of the butter in the container is smeared on the door frames. During these operations, the officiant intones "*Diita hikwahung'w ohaak, ne getlaang'w doren ti alsaiye*" ("Receive the butter from your cows and let it be good with our households"). If the rite is forgotten, it is believed that misfortunes and diseases will follow and the milk will have no butter.

c) *Bala'ngw A'ben* (New Crops) There are rites connected with new food crops. Before cereals are used for food, special *faa* (porridge) is cooked and placed on both side of the horizontal door frames. Likewise *bura-brew* from new millet or eleusine is first poured both at the door and also around the two *ufa*. Prayers are made to the sky people as well as to *Muk Yamu* to accept the offering and thus bless the crops for the people who will use them for food and drink. The rite for *basoro* (millet) is more elaborate. Before the harvesting of *basoro* all households organize a dance known as *niimariato*. Raw cereal and porridge are sent to the tombs. The officiant puts the offering on every tomb and intones "*Iuntorhung ohak hanos*" ("Receive your new basoro"). The Iraqw hold that if the ritual is not performed, people will suffer from indigestion everytime they eat *basoro*.

d) *Gii* This is a ritual directed to the spirit of the dead and it is not performed for more than one spirit at a time. The Iraqw are, as a rule, stingy with their livestock and they seldom slaughter them for food. It is said that there came a clever man who devised a method of making the people reduce their livestock partly to check soil erosion and also to enrich their diet. He consulted a diviner who performed the *Tlae Xu'ta* (divination) and pronounced his findings to the people. Some misfortunes are attributed to a dissatisfied '*Hee Yamu*' (singular for *Muk Yamu*) who is demanding sacrifice from the living relatives.

The sacrifice usually involve livestock and eleusine brew. The animal to be offered must not be a female beast but must be brindled. Before the killing, which is done in the morning, a tuft of grass called '*barsir gitso*' is placed on the appropriate *ufa*.<sup>(1)</sup> When performing this act, the officiant says "*Isa iseerok oheek*" ("So and so receive your such and such"). They also repeat the formula during the killing which is done near the entrance to the cow shed. The animal is made to face north and laid down facing west. After the killing, the viscera, the head, hooves, some bones, and chunks of barbecued meat are wrapped in the hide and sent to the appropriate '*ufa*' in the

evening. The spirit—*Hee Yamu*—comes disguised as a hyena and carries the bundle away.

### *Firro*-Petitions

The critical petitions addressed to *Loa* when some disaster threatens or is already a fact are known as *Firro*. The afflictions which go with such disasters range from human and livestock epidemics to natural disasters such as droughts. Such critical situations provide occasion for therapeutic rites which enable the participants to identify, expose and confront societal afflictions.

### *Firro*-Petitions (Requests)

Say / Mr. Sarmet I'll tell / Say how today we here meet for / Gathering this we  
*Toyaa / Ako Sarmet un babaw, / To ham lari ta diri dogan way / Dinkwar adori a*  
 not getting sometimes  
*slaslawanaka i'siye*

Say that / Wairaqw always say / Elders do say ancient  
*Toyagan, / Irgoro tan ain, / Bariseren in ain ya ang,*

Gathering is God given / Thing requests to God / Will unlost / Crowd thing they  
*Dinkwa a loa way / Garta firin dir loa ya, / I qwaqwadadindaka / Xoro ga biringa*  
 request / Thing it path good can is return  
*firin, / Gadada aqo lohir hho ng'in ar kakii'*

Say / House today we praiseworthy for / When praising it land all we praising  
*Toyaa, / Doowi lari un slufisan way; / Kuwa slufisan aqo yamu slemero in slufisan*

Say land ours we purify please / Land has dead  
*To yamu ren in tseesan raghay, / Yamu na gwair.*

People are in skins / Cows also sick/ Skin land also sick  
*Mu I bara falo, / Hikwa sleme tiqir / Falta yamu sleme tiq.*

Please agree skin of land cool off altogether / (altogether) Let cool off let cool off  
*Raqay yaamare falta yami tsaur raqay / (wote) I tsaur i tsaur*

Please people in skin now exactly they awake / Please they awake OK now exactly  
*Raqay muk bara falo hamir kila ni tlay / Raqay in tlay gan hamir kila*

People ours tell that / And mother tell wait ear put say / Have entered inside house /  
*Imir doren kabir ya / In ayo kiber lakite, ia qasak tyaa. / Aga dahan bara doowi, /*  
 Thing which inside house entered exist  
*Gar nisa bara doowi dahan i der.*

Say / Thing which entered inside house something small exist of course  
*Tayaa, / Gar nisa dahan bara doowi garka nina in der antaywo*

Say / This now eating though way sweet we eating is absent  
*Toyaa, / Gari hama a'yan ye ador tsu kar ayan i kahh.*

Say / Thing one which we here disturbing present is disease  
*Toyaa / Gari wak ar ti diri dawitimis i der a gewot.*

Say / It disturbing this disease if it is hand man belong / God we don't know  
*Toyaa, / Ti dawitimis gewori tam an ar dakw he tumu / loa u xuanaka*

Say / This disease if belongs God we cleansing  
*Toyaa, / Gewori barr loa loa a tseemisan.*

Say / People here in inside house here I begging now  
*Toyaa, / Imirir diri ar bara dodwi diri an firirim siwirthe*

Say / Sweat of this disease God please cool off / (people) Cool off cool off  
*Toyaa, / Hameririr gewori bar loa xase tsaur / (imi) Tsaur tsaur*

Say / I repeat saying this disease if is hand human  
*Toyaa, / Nay kii'nay o gewori wanes ar dakw he*

Say / Belong hand human it there returning  
*Toyaa, / Barar dakw he an amodadai kii'misan*

Say / However returns it never returns to his/hers / Theirs himself  
*Toyaa, / Isaqo kii'mamisan in bara kakia'ka amor hewos. / Kudadi alerok*

Say / But we leave  
*Toyaa, / Ala ata mawanake*

Say / Please breathe spear if hand human to / Hers/his theirs return / (crowd in  
*Toyaa, / Xase imi lawalari barar dakw he amor / Hewos kudadai kii'sare / (xoro in*  
 unison shout) Return on it returns to hers/his theirs  
*dinkwari tsee) Kii'sare gan, i kii' amor hewos kuda*

Say / Thing three is disturbing present  
*Toyaa, / Gar tam ti dawitimis I der.*

Say / Thing three is disturbing heresay is operation  
*Toyaa, / Gar tam ti dawitimis takahi a operashen.*

Say / Operation which know is human they enter in hospital they operate it  
*Toyaa, / Daqarof ta xuan a he kun dahas bara siptari kun daqaror ay.*

Say / Land can be operates we don't know  
*Toyaa, / Yamu kiwa daqaqan i xuanaka.*

Say / How operate land today we heard  
*Toyaa, / Ador daqaror yamu lara ga axasan.*

Say / Thing that how should well we don't know / Peacewise how should well  
*Toyaa, / Gar adorqa ador kas hho a xuanaka / Hhoarqa ador kas hhoo*  
 even elder even one can tell is absent  
*tam ako tamu wak ng'i o' mis kahh*

Say / People those we declare that stranger return or what say / Therefore  
*Toyaa, / Muk qaga an oana i ayaini kii laqar ma oan / Kara*

Say / Please agree that spear cool off brethren / (crowd) Let cool off let cool off  
*Toyaa, / Xase yaa'me lawalarqi tsaur imi / (xoro) I tsaur i tsaur*

Say / Say the four I repeat / Say the four I repeat / Say this veranda now we  
*Toyaa, / Toyaa ar tsiyahh niwa kii' / Totyaa ar tsiyahh niwa kii / Toyaa mundiri hama*  
 presently period season / Say this veranda now we presently period season  
*i diriah siwa? Qaday? / Toyaa, mundiri hama i diriah siwa qaday*

Say / Thing talking season dry  
*Toyaa, / Gar takaha qudo kahar*

Say / Season dry now which presently request  
*Toyaa, / Qadayi kahar ham tai dirian un firiman.*

Say / We request we talk that  
*Toyaa, / Bur firiman a kahan ya*

Say / We speak ligament cows and people season will tight  
*Toyaa, / An oan tamir hikwa nar mu qaday ng'i tsegi*

Say / People gatherings have I tell  
*Toyaa, / Imiri dinkwari diri an babaw*

Say / Season this now we presently have  
*Toyaa, / Qadayre kwi hamu uni dirian ye*

Say / Please ligament cows and / People will tie people / (crowd) Will tie ...  
*Toyaa, / Xase tamir hikwa nar / Mu ng'i tsegi imi / (xoro) Ng'i tsegi ...*

*Firro*—Free translation

Leader: Tell them this:  
 Please Mr. Sarmett I request you.  
 That today we have met here.  
 Usually we don't get gatherings like this one.  
 Tell them this:  
 That the Iraqw used to say  
 Our elders used to say in the old days  
 That God is ever present in any gatherings;  
 Whatever you have asked God  
 Will never be lost  
 Whenever a crowd for something  
 That thing will always materialize in a good way  
 Tell them this:  
 Let us pray at this house  
 By doing we shall also be praying for the whole land.  
 Tell them that we want to purify our land  
 Our land has been polluted.  
 All people are in sleeping animal skins.  
 People are sick.



Cattle are also sick.

The skin of the earth is also sick.

Let us all agree that the skin of the land get cool!!!

Crowd: Yes. let it cool, let it cool (i.e. be cleansed)

Leader: Let those in sleeping skins (hides) wake up immediately!!!

Crowd: Let them right now!!!!

Leader: Tell them this:

Tell my brethren this:

Including mothers and all, tell them to listen:

Tell them that today we have entered this house

There are reasons for entering this house

Tell them this:

We have entered this house because we have something to share

Tell them this:

We are trying to feast on this, but there is no peaceful

Way of enjoying it.

Tell them this:

One big thing disturbing us here is disease.

Tell them this:

This disease is troubling us yet we don't know whether it is caused by  
Loa or by man.

Tell them this:

If this disease has been inflicted on us by Loa then we ask for purification.

Tell them this:

I beg you all who have gathered here now

Tell them this:

(N.B. Here the leader shouts and his listeners also reply loudly.)

If this disease is from Loa. then may its fire cool off!!!

Crowd: Yes, may it cool off!!!

Leader: Tell them this:

I repeat, I say if this disease is man-made

Tell them this:

If it is man-made then let us return it to him

Tell them this:

We have returned it to its owners but it never agrees.

Tell them this:

We shall never tire to return diseases to their owners.

Tell them this: Now all of you:

If this sickness is a spear by a man.

Please brethren let us return this spear to its owners (loudly)!!!

Crowd: (in unison) Yes! Return it to him!!!

Leader: Tell them this:

There exists a third thing which disturbs us.

Tell them this:

A third thing disturbing us is called "Operation"  
 Tell them this:  
 The Operation we know is the one done in Hospitals.  
 Tell them this:  
 We have never heard of the land being "skinned" or "operates"  
 Tell them this:  
 We don't know yet how to react to this new thing.  
 Tell them this:  
 There isn't any living elder who can give the best advice to  
 us about these strangers.  
 Tell them this:  
 Shall we pray that these people go back to their own lands or  
 what shall we say?  
 Tell them this:  
 Please bretheren let that spear get cool!!

Crowd: Yes, let it cool!!!

Leader: Tell them this:  
 The fourth thing I wanted to say,  
 Tell them that, we are living in a season of September month  
 Tell them this:  
 We are begging this dry September month.  
 Tell them this:  
 On begging it we have this to say.  
 Tell them this:  
 That may it tie the ligament of both the peoples and the animals  
 Tell them this:  
 I want to say this to all the people who have gathered here  
 Tell them this:  
 We are with our September month  
 Tell them this:  
 Please bretheren may this dry September month  
 Tie the ligaments of all peoples and animals (loudly).

Crowd: Yes, may it tie them!!!

#### Slufay—Thanksgiving

The extempore litanies that accompany recurrent annual events regulated by the traditional almanac provide occasion for ceremonial rites. The compositions which are celebrative and panegyric constitute an elaborate catalogue of the anxieties, hopes and desires of the people. This goes to reveal that these litanies are a recitation and a commemoration of the traditional history of the Iraqw.

#### Slufay—Praise

Ear put / Ear put / Ear put / Ear put  
*IA quasaak / IA quasaak / IA quasaak / IA quasaak*

Floor House Full / Let them fill mother ours

*Kaa'fermo doowi hatsi, / aha ala ir hats ayir doren*

Let them and cat / Or and calf shed-pole they scramble / Milk they scramble

*Aha ala ne maytsi / Lagha ne tsaa'tamo kangarmo kurr qwatl, / Tsanqay kurr qwatl,*

Let them they share / Milk they scramble let them they share

*aha ala kurr en / Tsanqay kurr qwatl, aha ala kurr en*

Cattle us plateau good they graze / Let them homing / Of good they homing /

*Hikwa doren, getu hho ng'ur gaya, / Aha ng'ur dafir / Arr hho ng'ir dafir? /*

Grass bad they bush left / Of food they homing

*Gitsimir tlakw ng'i slaa'ti gexaye, / Arr hho ng'ir dafir?*

Bull ours and bull ostrich / Of stripes black

*Awu doren. ne o yaqambu sakweli, / Ar gwarr-a'ya boo*

They fight / They fight / Ball ours it win let it win

*Tir xwarir / Tir xwarir / Awu doren ir balin, aha alair balin*

Ours it fatten let it fill / Ours north move

*Ayaren ir wahhar, aha ala ir hats, / Ayaren i i'ykwi difiti*

Nambi it reach Nambi Qurus / Nambi it reach Nambi Qurus

*Nambi ng'ir mut, Nabir Qurus / Nambi ng'ir mut, Nabir Qurus*

We love love each / We love love each / Hand and mouth / Hand and mouth /

*Tir slaa slaan / Tir slaa slaan / Dawa ne afa / Dawa ne hhara /*

Leg and shoe / Back and skin / Back and skin

*Yae ne yaa'ti. / Danda ne tlawu / Banda ne tlawu*

Ours be fill / Ours be fill / Ours be fatten / Tail of ram

*Ayaren i hatsi / Ayaren i hatsi / Ayaren ir wahhar / Tsirir gwanda*

Ram Kayto / Kayto Lakay / Kaytor Lakay

*Gwandu Kayto / Kayto Lakay / Kaytor Lakay*

Ours peaceful / Elders ours heads / Youngsters ours heads crowns /

*Ayaren ir bubuxut / Bariser doren sage / Masombar doren sage indalay /*

Youngsters ours heads crowns

*Masomber doren sage indalay*

A curse coming / Curse of west / Curse if Harar / Curse forgiven

*Loorka hanos / Loosir u'wa, / Loosir Harar / Looda amorhho,*

Dambo decorated / Root Tiita / Gourd plate writings / Gourd plate writings

*Dambo qalay / Dearmo Tiita / Qwarea'mo goi / Qwarea'mo goi*

Ours fatten / Girl passing / After-birth it our de'

*Ayaren wahhar / Dasir warahh / Tsa'tay ng'u ayare gas,*

Hearth pass / Cowshed it end / Cowshed end

*Tlaa'fri oh / Matlaa'ngwi aluti / Matlaa'ngwi aluti*

Ours full / Ours full / Foreigners there are / Foreigners of north  
*Ayare hatsi / Ayare hatsi / Homarka hanos / Homosing o i'ya,*

Is Masai / Elder ours and elder Masai  
*An Duwanqedamo / Ako doren, ne ako Duwanqedomo,*

Sauce rotten they share / Foreigners coming / Foreigners south  
*Aha ala kurr en / Homarka hanos / Homasir basa*

Is Barbaigs / Elder Barbaigs / Elder Barbaigs  
*An Barbaydu / Ako Barbaydu / Ako Barbaydmo,*

And father ours / Sauce rotten they share / Foreigners coming / Foreigner east  
*Ne babu doren / Nanu dixte kurr en / Homarka hanos; / Homosu daa'w.*

Mbugwe east / Elder Mbugwe  
*Manimo daa'w / Ako Manimo,*

And father ours / Tug-of brew they pull / Tug-of brew they pull  
*Ne babu doren, Tumbi kar urux / Tumbi kar urux*

Let it twist / Elder ours let win / Elder ours let win  
*Aha ir u'lit / Ako doren ng'ir al / Ako doren ng'ir al*

Foreigners we win / Foreigners we reign / something coming / Thing in house  
*Homa ng'i alane / Homa ng'i alane / Garka hanos, / Gar dir doowi.*

Please anybody house who against / If youngster / Belongings agemate let homing /  
*Raqay he doowi gwa sakii'. / Barr masomo / Xosla gari ng'ir watl, /*  
 Or if grandmother  
*Laqa barr ama,*

Nursing children grand let quit / Nursing child grand let quit  
*Umtor naa' nang'w ng'ir gexer / Umtor naa nang'w ng'ir gexer*

Or if elder / Or if elder / Menroom let quit  
*Laqa bar ako / Laqa barr ako / Hulan ng'ir gexay.*

### *Slufay*—Free Translation

Please listen / Please listen / Please listen / Please listen  
 May the floor of this house be full / Let it be filled to capacity.  
 Our mother, / Our mother  
 Let her with the cat / Or with the calf  
 Let them compete over a shed-pole / Let them scramble for milk / Let them share  
 it, / Let them share it.  
 Our cattle, / Let them graze over a nice plateau / And them return home over a  
 nice plateau  
 The bad bitter grass / Let them not come with it home / Let them not come with  
 it home

Our bull / With the bull of ostriches, / The one with black and white stripes.  
 Let them fight / Let them fight. / Let our bull win! / Let our land drive north-  
 wards  
 Until we reach the outskirts / Outskirts of Qurus / Outskirts of Qurus.  
 Let there be love amongst ourselves. / Let there be love amongst ourselves /  
 like the hand and the mouth,  
 The hand and the stick / The leg and the shoe. / The body and clothes. / The body  
 and clothes,  
 Our land be full, / Our land be full, / Our land grow fat / Like the tail of a ram  
 The ram of Kayto / Kayto Lakay / Kayto Lakay / Kayto Lakay / Our land sleep  
 in peace.  
 Our young men wear crowns. / There is this curse, / This curse of the west.  
 The curse of Harar: / We withdraw that curse; / We make it beautiful  
 Like the roots of Tiita / Like a decorated gourd-plate / Like a decorated plate of  
 a gourd. / Our land grow fat.  
 Let a travelling girl. / Deliver a child in our land: / Let this delivery / Begin from  
 the hearth, / And end in the cowshed, / And end in the cowshed.  
 Our land be filled, / There are these foreigners (or invaders). / This foreigner from  
 the north, / The Masai;  
 Let our father and a Masai father. / Let them share rotten mboga / The Masai;  
 Let our father and a Masai father, / Let them share rotten mboga / Let them share  
 rotten mboga.  
 There are other foreigners / The southern foreigners, / The Barbaigs.  
 The father of the Barbaigs, / And our father / Let them share rotten mboga.  
 There are other foreigners, / The eastern foreigners, / The Mbugwe  
 The Mbugwe father / And our father / Let them pull a tug of war / Let them pull  
 a tug of war / Let our father win.  
 Let us reign over all the foreigners. / Let us reign over all the foreigners.  
 One more thing. / One thing about this house / Any one who turns against this  
 house,  
 If he is a teenager / Let his age-mates only return with his things  
 If it is an old woman. / Let her never nurse her grandchildren;  
 If it is an old man, / If it is an old man. / Let him dissappear from the "men's-  
 room".

*Shufay—Praise*

Time morning / Morning small / Morning not big / Morning down / We at have /  
*Ima matla / Matla kanina / Matla ka ureka / Matla gehheri / An i dirian /*  
 Crop women  
*Balalir, ameni*

Let us eat / Let afternoon / We are walking / We are walking  
*Kar and a'yan / Kar tlatlas'ng'w / Un i hiitan / Un i hiitan*

Let lost / It afternoon homing / It afternoon homing / Badluck vanish / Badluck  
*Kar qwaruren / I tlatlaa' dafi / I tlatlaa' dafi / Umutler hhan, / Umutler*  
 vanish  
*hhan,*

Let thresholds being they fight / Morning tomorrow  
*Kar pupuhhay karr loir slaqw / Mat'ler matlo*

Let it this / Something minute here / Something small / Our hands swollen /  
*Kar bar ti / Hanqirka areng, / Hanqir nina / Dabarewa sluff, /*  
 Hands women  
*Xaba a'mena.*

Let being swollen / Let being swollen / Elders ours  
*Kar ng'iwa sluff / Kar ng'iwa sluff / Bariser doren*

Let dirtiness / Let being eating / They tug-of bit / Dirtiness Manda  
*Kar tlakaa'ra / Kar ng'iwa a'yin / Ti tumbar mukh / Tumbar Manda*

We let win / Crowd inside / Crowd inside / Haters exist / Haters exist  
*Aten kar alan / Xoror barakar / Xoror baraka / Wakuse der / Wakuse der*

Any goodness who want / Goodness we share / Any dislikers / Any dislikers /  
*O hhoa ga sla / Hhoa ka eman / O wakusamo / O wakusamo /*  
 Hatredsome  
*Wakusamoren*

We he's hate / Crowd they hate / Crowd they dislike  
*Aten time wak / Xoro gan wak / Xoro ga slaika*

When inside house entering / House of Gwandu / Gwandu Daa'ta /  
*Iwa bara doowi darat / Doowa do Gwandu / Gwandu Daa'ta /*  
 Of the Gallet / Of the Gallet  
*O hhay Gallet / O hhay Galllet*

Clan Manda / Manda east / Foreigners Manda  
*Tlahha Manda / Manda Daa'w / Homar Manda*

Let and we / We girls intermarriage / We girls intermarriage  
*Kar ne aten / ti dasu duxane / ti dasu duxane*

Let foreigners / Foreigners exist / Those another / Which separate walking  
*Kar homari / Homarka i der / Todar hatla / Ar dimbe hiimit*

There another exist / Are Wamasai / Let us capture each / Let us capture each  
*Karar hatli der / A Duwanghe / Kar ti hayo hane / Kar ti hayo hane*

Foreigners south / Foreigners south / They're Wairangi / They're Wairangi  
*Homadar basa / Homadar basa / Karan Irangi / Karan Irangi*

Let and us / We girls married / Let we girls intermarriage / Of the Dulen  
*Kar he aten / Ta dasu duxan / Kar tir dasu duxane / Ar do Dulen*

Let we've scrambled / Foreigners Barbaigs / Foreigners exist / Foreigners Bargaigs  
*Kar ng'ira slaqwan / Homar Tara / Homarki der / Homar Tara:*

Let and us / We girls intermarriage / Let talkings / Let her agree  
*Kar ne aten / Ti dusu duxane / Kar kahayten / Kar lo gar yaa'n*

Cowdung have four / Cowdung is three / Cowdung is three  
*Hakay ng'u kuus / Hakay da tam / Hakay da tam*

Today having / Morning we are / Morning very small tiny / Afternoon we proceeding  
*Laran qao koman / Matta i dirian / Matler qo nina / Tlatlaa uni hiitan*

Let afternoon ours / Let afternoon ours / Let afternoon  
*Kar tlatlaa'ng'w ren / Kar tlatlaa'ng'w ren / Kar tlatlaa'ng'w*

Let lost animal / Cattle they going / Let plateau good they going  
*Kar qwaruren / Hikwa nir tlaya / Kar getu hhongu'r tlaya*

They homing / Grass bitter/sour / Bush left / Which sweet they homing  
*Ng'ur dafiya / Gitsimir qarqar / Slaati gexaye / Ar muqnuq ng'ir dafiye*

Youngsters ours they and grazers / Grasper ours  
*Masombar doren kar ne deeme / Deemer doren*

Let and tick-eater / Cattle they warn / Cattle they warn  
*Kar ne a'lay / Hikwa kir nanaq / Hikwa kir nanaq*

Evening / Cattle had homing / Let women / And cattle / Let and calves / Let poles  
*Tsindowo / Hikwa na dafir / Kar a'mena / Ne hikwa / Kar ne tsee'to / Kar uhem*

They pass let they pass / Youngsters ours they receive / Ditch wet they through  
*Kir warhh kar kir warahh / Masombar doren ir al-xawin / Guhhu naa' ng'ur geger*  
 went ditch wet  
*kerr guhhu naa'*

Let is they through went / Let grazers cattle it tails drop / Let grazers cattle  
*Kar lo ng'ur geger kerr / Kar deeme hikwa ng'i hhaysheri slaxir / Kar deeme hikwa*  
 it tails drop  
*ng'i hhaysheri slaxir*

Armpits they carry / Armpits they carry / Let name bad let it disappear  
*Slaremo ng'ur huwit / Slaremo ng'ur huwit / Kar umu tlakw: Kar loir hhan*

Let alarm alarm extend / Let alarm alarm extend  
*Kar wi: ui sawes / Kar ui ui sawes*

Mouths holes / Mouths holes twisted / Of thorns let down  
*Afer bohoe: / Afer bohoe utlit / Ar laqelo: kar lo ir baray*

Human crowd who hate / House hads looking / May you if even grandfather  
*He Xoro ga wak / Doowi gusa qaytsit / Tatae kung ham wana ako*  
 or grandmother  
*laqa ama*

She nursing want of children grands / Or woman producing  
*In umtor sla ar naa nangos / Laqa a'menir laqwalim*

House looking at / Crowd dislikes / Crowd dislikes / When house looking /  
*Doowi qaytsimit / Xoror wakmis / Xoror wakmis / Isa doowi qaytsit /*  
 Or girl of virgin/maiden  
*Laqa dasi ar mai'*

Then in case of black or red / If red may she / Footpath follow/ Footpath  
*Kar wannes ar bo-o' laqar daa't / Barar daa't, ayire king / Hayri eharek / Hoyrir*  
 animals / Of animals reddish / Of animals reddish  
*makay / Ar maka daa'ten / Ar maka daa'ten*

When its black / When its black / Kitchen lighten / Fallow hall if the middle  
*Kar barar boo' / Kar barar boo' / Tlaa'fi thuwaa't / Deli huek, bara tlaa'ng'w*  
 fallow / If teenager may you  
*deli / Bara masomo: tate kung:*

Belongings / Let you agemates be / Belongings agemates they / Bone skull teen-  
*Xoslarok / Kar ta gau err. / Xoslarok qari ng'ir wat / Farta sagok, masomba*  
 agers they be drumming  
*ng'i i pundus,*

Teenagers ants / Of hawks it water had / If grandfather may you /  
*Masombar hharhhara / Ar xwaaro, ng'i maay err / Bar ako tatae kung /*  
 You house looking at  
*Kwa doowi qaytsimit*

House of Gwandu / Crowd dislikes you in house / May he crowd dislikes /  
*Dou do Gwandu / Xoro slaaka ku dir doowihe / Tatae kung xoro slaaka /*  
 If passer-by whenever grandfather on path  
*Bar hhayutusmo; wanan ako: buru lohi*

Grandfather own-country he house looking at / Room we vacant  
*Ako ayawi, i doowi qaytsimit / Hularok kari awahan*

Fleas it inherit / Art-eater it excavating whether Alawa / Then vaccinating /  
*Kwasiyang'w ng'i ali / Fela ng'ir xorxorin, tar Alawmowos / Daqdi tuu'u'h /*  
 If grandmother she nursing want  
*Bar ama: i umtor slaa*

You bed this you are you on the stairs floor drop / If woman who birth-giver  
*Ka kitarari diri: a gawa tsaa'ma: tleri e'tek / Bar Bar a'meni: Ar laqwalusoo:*  
 You birth-giver  
*Ka aqwalusloo,*

Crowd I dislike she crowd dislikes / You house looking / You people dislikes /  
*Xoro a slaaka: ki xoro slaaka / A doowi qaytsimit / Ka muk wakmis /*  
 You people dislikes  
*Ka muk wakmis*



You birth want / Mahhi kill / Of women / Of women / Alarm disappear  
*Ka xwaylar slaa / Mahhi gas: / Karu a'mena / Karu a'mena / Uirok i sawes,*

In between hills / Hills three Hills / Ear miss/ Ear miss /  
*Bara tlaa'ng'w tlomi-i Tloma tom: Tlomoaa akwesio / Ia dakuse / Ia dakuse /*  
 Ear miss / If youngster / Or passer-by / On footpath  
*la dakuse / Bar masomo / Laqa hhayutusmo. / Buru lohi;*

He house looking / He crowd dislikes may you / You shield have path shield  
*I doowi qaytsimit / I xoror wakmis; tatae kung. / Kwa gambor kon: Lohira fambor*  
 have / Shield upset side it upward it  
*kon / Gambi warqer: gura ng'u gawta xuus*

Hawk it shit on / Hawk it shit on / Vulture take it that human that watch  
*Xwaari ng'i i o'o's. / Kuray ng'i i gusasin / Gwarsei kabeto akh he sing xuxuang*

Back see tounge behind pick up / Becasue crowd he dislikes  
*Ahuwa arang: tsifirangw alur tatahhang / Asma Xoro gan slaika*

Hyena tell you're Hhawu / Human that watch he there slept /  
*Baha kabeto ka Hhawu / He sing xuxuek a sisi guu /*  
 Cold has kill please human that cover  
*Tsaqwa gwa gas, ax he sing untsusek*

Garment is tail / You ash eat / You ash eat / It cave reside  
*Hinwerok a hhaysho / Ka daa'rur ak / Ka da'arar a'k / A Mara hot*

Any goodness who wish goodness be share / People they love each  
*O hhoa ga slaa, hhoa ka eman / Mu tir slaa—sla*

Cloth and body / Water and honey / Water and honey / Water and honey /  
*Tlawu ne danda / Maay ne danu / Maay ne damu / Maay ne damu /*  
 Ankle and shoe / Leg and shoe / Pestle and mortar / Pestle and mortar  
*Kolo ne yaa'ti / Yae ne yaa'ti / Musa ne kune / Musa ne kune*

People they love each / People they love each / Period we are period September  
*Mu tir slaa-sla / Mu tir slaa-sla / Ima ni dirian ima Qaday*

September ours let her premature-born / And when premature-born /  
*Qado doren, lo ir dorowin / Ne iwa dorowin /*  
 Youngsters ours girls over they compete/or scramble please  
*Masombar doren: dasu gaemo ng'us qwatlit xa*

Let they compete/scrumble, Veranda of we live of the Sablio / We live forever we  
*Aha ng'us qwatlit: Mundir ta hotean, ardo Salibo / Ka hota hheesan: Ka*  
 cattle have graze / We calves marked  
*hikwa wa deen / Ka damaywa Layin*

Teenagers ours / Teenagers ours / And of Dulen they graze / Youngster theirs  
*Daqo doren / Daqo doren / Ne odo Dulen tar al deen / Masomo doin,*  
 of Dulen  
*o do Dulen*

Please be win sword him drop / Ours him pickup / Let ours him killing / Let  
*Xa kur bali, lawala ng'i slaxi / Koren ng'i tatahhi / Kar koren ng'ir sluqi / Kar*  
 ours him killing  
*koren ng'ir sluqi*

Grandfather theirs let and our / Grandfather theirs let and our / They debate /  
*Ako doin kar ne koren / Ako doin kar ne koren / Tual kwaslemut /*  
 Of Dulen be weaken  
*Odo Dulen i nuquti*

Let ours ornament him pick up / Of Masai him drop / Grandfather ours him  
*Kar koren sixmo ng'ur tatahhi / Odo Duwanghe ng'u slaxi / Ako doren ng'u*  
 pick up  
*tatahhi*

Him debating / Him debating / Grandmother theirs grandmother of Dulen  
*Ng'ur kwaslemuti / Ng'ur kwaslemuti / Amar doin, amar do Dulen*

Garment her drop let and ours / Lice they pick it up / Grandmother ours let lice  
*Hinwe gar slax; kar ne toren / Ina kar al tatahhan / Amar doren kar itinaro*  
 let her watching / Grandmother theirs lice her fail  
*kar ir xumis / Amar doin itina ng'i harslaqat*

Let lice grandmother ours her shaking / Let lice grandmother ours her shaking /  
*Kar inada; amar doren gar kukuu / Kar inada; amar doren gar kukuu /*  
 Let garment that grandmother ours her grandchildren nurse / Children grands  
*Kar hinwe da; amar doren gar daqaywosar umin / Daqo nangos*

Let bad-luck disappear / Garments women of grandmothers / Please children /  
*Kar umtlie hhan / Biritsito amena, of amamii / Xase nai' /*  
 Elders ours let and grandmother  
*Bariser doren; kar ne amamii.*

*Slufay*—Praise—Free Translation

This is the scarifice for thanksgiving to Loa, to the dead and the living for their participation in farming.

The time is morning / The dawn is small / The dawn is tiny  
 We are at it / They are at it / The women's crops  
 Let us eat them for food / Let us eat them for food  
 And the afternoon / We are matching it / We are matching it  
 Our lost animals / Let them return at day-time / Let them return at day-time  
 May badluck vanish / May our thresholds win / The Mbugwes / And us  
 We have intermarried our daughters / There are other foreigners: / Other foreigners  
 to exist.  
 The other ones / Those walking astray / Tomorrow's dawn. / Be like this one.  
 Something minute / Let it expand from our hand / Women's hands  
 May it increase from their hands / May it increase from their hands

Our elders / Grow a big layer of fat / And let them dine with it / And let them  
 fight with thieves  
 The Nyiramba's thieves / Let us inherit them / The crowd which has assembled  
 here / The crowd which has assembled here:  
 Bad people exist / Bad people exist. / Those who want goodness / Let us share  
 goodness.  
 The bad ones. / The bad ones; / Our bad person: / He hates us / He hates crowds /  
 He dislikes crowds.  
 Entering this house / This is the house of Gwandu / Gwandu Daa'ta / Of the  
 Gallet clan / Of the Gallet clan. / The clan of Wambugwe  
 The Wambugwe of the east, / We have intermarried our daughters. / Let us marry  
 each other's daughters / Let us marry each other's daughters. / Let us marry  
 each other's daughters.  
 The foreigners in the south / The foreigners in the south / The Irangi / The Irangi  
 They and us / Have married each other's daughters / Let us continue marrying our  
 daughters.  
 The Masai foreigners / We have failed with each other. / The Barbaig foreigners; /  
 Other foreigners exist / The Barbaigs.  
 They and us / Are marrying each other's daughters / Let their daughters listen to  
 our orders  
 Let them clean our cowsheds / Three times / Three times. / Today we are busy /  
 We are beginning a morning / A very tiny morning / A very tiny morning.  
 We are proceeding to day-time / Let our day / Let our day / Let our day-time /  
 Let our lost animals  
 May our cattle go grazing / Let our cattle graze peacefully in the hills. / May our  
 cattle go grazing / Let our cattle graze peacefully in the hills. / May our cattle  
 return peacefully from grazing.  
 The bitter grass / Be left in the bush / The sweet grass / Be brought home.  
 Our male teenagers and the cattle boys / Our cattle boys / And the birds who eat  
 ticks from cattle / Sing to our cattle / Sing to our cattle.  
 In the evening / Cattle are coming home: / Our women / And our cattle / And  
 our calves / Near the cowshed poles / Clash over each other / Clash over each  
 other.  
 Our male teenagers / Go to receive our cattle / Break the tedious meanders / The  
 wet ditches and angled paths, / Be broken.  
 The cattle boys drop the arrange tails on the cattle's backsides / The cattle boys  
 drop the arrange tails on the cattle's backsides. / Their armpits collect things.  
 May all bad lick avoid us / May screams of alarms disappear / May screams of  
 alarms disappear / May screams of alarms disappear.  
 The mouths of holes. / May the mouths of holes be twisted. / May the mouths of  
 thorns fall upside-down / The hater of gatherings / Who turns against this house  
 with a bad eye.  
 If you are an elderly man / Or an old woman / Who wants to nurse grandchildren. /  
 Or if it is a woman bearing children,

Looking at this house with a bad eye / Causing conflicts amongst people / Causing  
 conflicts amongst people / Causing conflicts amongst people.  
 If it is a young girl, a maiden / If she is black or dark-brown / If she is dark-  
 brown / Will you follow  
 The footpaths of animals / Of red wild animals / Of red wild animals. / If she is  
 black / If she is black. / May the hearth remain empty / Fall in the fallow, in the  
 middle of a fallow.  
 If it is a boy-teenager, / May you take your things and weapons / Go in the bush  
 hunting with your agemates / But may your agemates return only with your  
 weapons.  
 May ants turn your skull, into a drum / The teenagers of ants / And of vultures /  
 Use your skull and drinking jug.  
 If it is an old man / You are looking with a bad eye.  
 This house of Gwandu / Our male teenagers / Let them scramble over the girls in  
 other countries  
 We live in Sabilo / Let us live in it seriously / May we process a surplus of castra-  
 ted bulls / So we may also mark our calves / Our boys our boys.  
 Graze our cattle together with Masai boys / The Masai boys. / Let them be over-  
 come / Let them drop their swords / Let own women pick up these dropped  
 swords  
 So they may cut pumpkins with them / And win by using them, and win by using  
 them / And their elders with ours / And their elders with ours  
 Let them debate in councils / May the Masai elder fail disastrously / May our  
 elder confiscate their ornaments / And debate with them  
 A Masai elder women / Let her pick lice with it / And may our elder women be  
 victorious  
 Let their elder woman fail to pick lice / Let our elder woman inherit Masai gar-  
 ments / And use them for covering her grandchildren / And let them avoid us.  
 You are hating the people in this house / You dislike people. / If it is a visitor, an  
 elder, passing-by  
 The elder of this country, looking with bad intentions / May your room remain  
 vacant, / May fleas inherit it / May other animals scratch it / As if to cure you.  
 If it is an old woman who wants to nurse children. / Your are on your bed / May  
 you fall under your bed.  
 If it is a woman still producing children / Yet she is disliking crowds. / Yet she is  
 disliking crowds.  
 And you are looking disapprovingly at this house / You are also causing mis-  
 understanding between people / Yet you want to produce children  
 May the pain kill you / The pain of women in labour / The agony of women in  
 labour / May your crise echo  
 In the caves of mountains / In the three mountains / The three mountains called  
 cooking stones.  
 May your hearth stay without bed-poles / May your hearth stay without bed-poles /  
 May your hearth stay without bed-poles.

If it is a teenager, / Or a traveller on the path. / Looking disapprovingly at this house / Looking disapprovingly at this house. / He wants to watch strifes.  
 If you have a shield on your way / May it turn upside down: May it turn outwards / May vultures shit on it / May the hawks drive on it / May the hawks drive on it.  
 Tell the vultures to watch this traveller / Looking at him from behind, / Pull his tongue through the back of his head  
 Because he dislikes gatherings / Tell the hyena that he is a Hhawu / Look at this sleeping man / He is dying of cold, please cover him with your robes  
 You have robes / Your robes in your tail / You eat ash / You eat ash / You live in houses.  
 Those who want goodness / Let us share goodness / People love each other  
 Like the body and clothes / Like honey and water / Like honey and water / Like honey and water  
 Like the foot and the shoes / Like the pestle and the mortar / Like the pestle and the mortar / Everybody to cordial to others / Everybody to cordial to others.  
 We are at the period / The period of September / May our September produce early / When it is producing.

## CONCLUSION

The annual and the seasonal rites of the Iraqw, according to C. B. Johnson, mark them off from their Bantu and Nilo-Hamitic neighbours. The "rites are mainly performed to obtain rain, to keep diseases, plague and other evils away, or to stop them if they have already entered the country" (Johnson, 1966). It is pertinent to the concerns of this paper that tribute has been paid to the sublimity of diction exemplified by the extempore oral compositions which are part of the performance of the rites. Recalling the poetry of the Bible from habit and upbringing, and confronting the actualized delivery of *Firro* and *Shufay*, Johnson concludes. "It would be hard to find more beautiful words in the Bible!" (Johnson, 1966).

Katsuyoshi Fukui (Fukui, 1970) has taken note of the solemnity which characterizes the harvest and the ushering in of a new agricultural season. Shohei Wada, however, seeing the potential of the ritual texts as historical sources, declares them "an abstract expression of the tribal history. It relates the history of their expansion and co-existence with other tribes" (Wada, 1969). The thrust of the discussion of these scholars of the Iraqw culture, is on the rites as instances of poetry. This, of course, is to submit that the verbalized accompaniments to the rites are chants. The chants of *Firro* and *Shufay* are, however, not mythological but realistic recitations of tribal hopes and anxieties. These chants are distinguished by procedures and conventions which provide rhythmical movement to what would remain ordinary language. The procedures and the conventions constitute the form that is taken over by successive generations and becomes the frame into which words are fitted during ritual occasions.

The verbal texts accompanying the calendrical and critical rituals provide an appro-

priate ground for discussing and exposing the texts as examples of Iraqw traditional poetry, and a genre of oral literature.

*Firro* falls under the critical petitions which deal with immediate problems facing the people. The length of the text depends on the number and magnitude of the problems, and the words are not in a set order. Furthermore, the texts are composed and improvised to be congruent not only with the specific problems but are identified also with a specific geographical locale. The spokesman who leads the proceedings represents the assembly as he acts as their collective voice and presents their petitions to *Loa*.

The mode of delivery is also worth attention. The people's collective longings, wishes and fears are spelt out through allusion or by direct address. The spokesman having exposed the evil, employs a barrage of similes and metaphors to dramatize its effects, as he exhorts the assembly by verbal exclamations and physical gesticulations to join him and with concerted effort will the evil go away. That particular evil being cast out, the spokesman unfolds a catalogue of other evils threatening the people. The problems constitute thought groups or compositional units, and the climatic sanctioning by the assembly prepares the audience for a smooth transition to other issues.

The Iraqw, unlike their Bantu and their Nilo-Hamitic neighbours, do not live in clan clusters. Thus one's next door neighbours are strangers. In such a set up, personal and public safety are ensured through an inbuilt code of mutual respect and personal regard. The tribal ethic enjoins people to maintain goodwill among themselves to ensure good luck—which is progress. Thus to avert disaster, and in order not to disturb the much prized harmony, people not only wish each other success but also behave in such a way as to realize the good they all desire. Consequently, a person has to know both his rights and obligations and also the rites connected with them. In the *Shufay* litanies, allusions are made to the ongoing activities in the society, but the emphasis falls on the pursuit for happiness and prosperity. The texts, besides their ritual functions and significance, infuse the listeners with verbal potency to triumph over the neighbouring tribes. In this respect, the texts reveal something of the history of the tribe. We can discern the conditions under which the society has evolved, how people behaved and acted towards one another, toward their friendly as well as hostile neighbours and how to maintain peace which accounts for the progress achieved.

These thanksgiving calendrical and celebrative events mark the end and the beginning of a new season. They provide an opportunity for a renewal of the ritual contract and a maintenance of the social structure. Over the years the verbal texts have come to dissociate the ritual import and become the way of saying and hearing of expected things at important gatherings.

Social gatherings among the Iraqw centre around the flow of the events in which words anticipate and animate each other. Through repetition of certain key words, traditionally fixed expressions and concepts, themes are developed and are aurally reinforced. Through parallelism and the use of antithesis, diverse traditional similes and metaphors issue in habitual collocations which become the poetic thread of the chants. The word *crowd*, for instance, in these chants collocates with audience. *assem-*

*bly, people* and hence with the Iraqw. Thus:

The crowd which is assembled here / The crowd which is assembled here:  
 Bad people exist / Bad people exist  
 Those who want goodness / Let us share goodness  
 The bad ones. / The bad ones:  
 Our bad persons / He hates us / He hates crowds / He dislikes crowds.

The Iraqw have a saying, "Nothing goes wrong in a gathering". This suggests that while opportunity for discussion lasts, peace and prosperity are assured. As long as individuals see themselves as part of the community, the people's sense of belonging or identity can be maintained. Otherwise, if selfishness and individualism flourish, the community will disintegrate because of inner contradictions. Thus:

The hater of gatherings / Who turns...with a bad eye,  
 If you are an elderly man / Or an old woman....  
 Causing conflicts amongst people / Causing conflicts amongst people....  
 If it is a boy-teenager / May you.... Go in the bush hunting.... / But may your  
 agemates return only with your weapons.  
 May ants turn your skull into a drum / The teenagers of ants.  
 And of vultures / Use your skull as a drinking jug.

Repetition in these chants as an analogical method serves to impress upon the listeners the importance of what is being said. It also confines the reciter to the tradition of *Firro* and *Slufay* in which lexical congruity and habitual collocation issue in verbal satisfaction as the reciter voices and the audience hears the expected word.

Let there be love amongst ourselves / Like the hand and the mouth. / The hand  
 and the stick / The leg and the shoe,  
 The body and clothes / The body and clothes / Our land be full / Our land be full  
 Our land grow fat / Like the tail of a ram

Repetition determines and maintains the speed of the delivery of the chants, and forges thematic unity by insistence.

There are other foreigners / The eastern foreigners.  
 The Mbugwe father / And our father  
 Let them pull a tug of war / Let them pull a tug of war  
 Let our father win / Let us reign over all the foreigners / Let us reign over all the  
 foreigners.

These and such lines, besides indicating tribal rivalry, insist on the necessity and importance of improvement and development in the economic and social spheres in order to triumph over their neighbours.

Allusion to locally fixed references add to the beauty of the poetry. The mention of proverbial personages like *Kayto Lakay* in an attempt to encourage and organize competition among themselves is complemented elsewhere by evoking the renown of *Manda*. This clan is known for its rain makers and it is therefore easy to see the connection between livestock and agricultural development being aided by timely rains.

If rain is essential to their prosperity, intermarriage with the surrounding peoples is just as essential for peace, and it is expected and accepted.

It is interesting to note that the four points of the compass are not mere reference points. They are in fact invested with significance, which once grasped, enriches appreciation of the poetry. East, for instance, points to a person or a group which has gone out of the tribe and acquired alien cultural values. To go east for the Iraqw is to repudiate their own people and thus become alienated from them. The north points to their traditional enemies the Masai with whom they have not intermarried, for as they say "We have failed each other". The south refers to the Barbaig with whom there is considerable mixing. The west denotes the Nyiramba and Turu people who are held in low esteem by the Iraqw, for they were often hired to perform the menial tasks in Iraqw households.

The Iraqw, as John Burra puts it, "value cooperation and peace among themselves and therefore, they did not only encourage friendliness but prayed for it, too" (Burra, 1985). As a result "*Shufay*" was recited. John Burra emphasizes, whenever people met as a group. These traditional litanies are actually an activity of the entire community of which they realistically pass judgement on the quality and purpose of life. The community participates in the drama of social welfare by acclamations of assent and by repudiation of undesirable behaviour through the spoken word. The facts of the Iraqw life are enumerated and displayed in these verbal feasts for moral and practical education. For the Iraqw speech calls forth and accomplishes social tasks and thus manages social life since:

"Life consists of propositions about life.

The human reverie is a solitude in which these propositions torn by dreams, by the terrible incantations of defeats and by the fear that defeats and dreams are one.

The whole race is a poet that writes down

The eccentric propositions of its fate" (Stevens).

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## NOTE

- (1) In *Aya Iraqw* two special cow dung heaps are to be seen some distance away from the house. These heaps are supposed to contain all the dung from the entire herd that the family possesses. When a married man dies he is buried beside the right-hand side *ufa* and a woman on the left hand side *ufa*.

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